

November 9, 2005

Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for issuing this NPRM. As an individual with a bilateral profound hearing loss, television closed captions have been a lifeline for me – both as a way to be informed and as a means to stay abreast with others in political and social conversations.

Firstly, please pay heed to the growing importance of captions for internet sources (which I'll say fall under the auspices of video programming). For example, people can now download episodes of television programs to their iPods. Also, as a professor at Southern Methodist University, I often must keep abreast of current events and broadcasts. These current events come in handy when I must teach my students to develop rhetorical skills. Such resources, which are often educational, are not captioned, and the FCC needs to keep a watchful eye out for new technological developments.

Additionally, the FCC must address the lack of access to the networks. The networks seem to go out of their way to be as inaccessible as possible. When captions suddenly disappear in the middle of a show (most likely due to failure to pass through captions at the local level), it is impossible to alert the local cable station to fix the problem. Simply placing an alert button on the website that allows a consumer to generate a trouble ticket that automatically gets sent to the appropriate staff should largely solve this problem.

Networks – broadcast, cable and satellite, are responsible for the quality of captions and should be held accountable. I support TDI's proposal for a general complaint form that can be applied consistently to all providers as well as the FCC.

As for the quality of captions: captions must, at minimum, provide a complete rendering of the audio soundtrack, either through literal rendering or appropriate description. For example, a gunshot sound should be conveyed. Individuals should also be able to read words spoken in a foreign language (at the very least, all Spanish in English-language programming must be written out, and vice versa), not to mention other non-speech sounds that convey meaning.

The one exception would be, in real time captioning, mistarts or stutters, incomplete words, and fillers such as "um" when it is not intentional.

Furthermore, all pre-recorded captions must be nearly 100% perfect. I support the FCC's query of whether an error rate of 0.2% for offline and 3% for realtime captioning to be appropriate. (Re offline, ensuring this level of quality would require the networks to pay the captioning firm sufficiently to allow for review for completeness and accuracy.)

Any show that has been recorded in advance (say, at least 12 to 24 hours before airing), should have offline captioning – at the attendant quality levels. Too often, pre-recorded shows are broadcast with "live" captions. This is annoying because live captions are always 5 seconds or more behind the action, and we KNOW that this show was pre-recorded!

Finally, the FCC needs to take a more proactive approach to enforcing the law. Networks who do not caption regularly, much less during emergency situations, should and must be fined. The FCC should monitor networks (to minimize cost, use volunteer consumer monitoring organizations) to ensure compliance, particularly with the pre-rule and new caption standards that go into effect Jan. 1, 2006. The FCC must be empowered to use TDI's complaint form and monitoring data to impose penalties on those stations and networks that fail to comply with standards.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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